



Guidelines for Best Management Practice Installation With Funding Provided by the Agricultural Resources Conservation Fund (ARCF)
Fiscal Year 2001

1. Introduction

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) is committed to reducing the impact of agricultural practices on the water resources of our state. Historically, funding has been provided to landowners through the Soil Conservation Districts (SCDs) for the installation of Best Management Practices (BMPs). In previous years, the measures of success have been in terms of tons of soil saved or total numbers of acres treated by BMPs. Recently, new initiatives by the federal government have made it essential that the measure of success be in terms of measurable water quality improvements. To this end, we strongly recommend the adoption by ARCF recipients of the following procedures.

BMP Selection Process

TDA recommends that each SCD begin the following process in advance of the Fiscal Year 2001 allocations, and complete it within approximately twelve(12) months.

Watershed Evaluations. All SCDs should assess the streams in their county, and should certainly be aware of the ones that are listed as impaired on the 303(d) List. Agricultural operations that are having an obvious negative impact on water quality should be identified by the SCD. The landowners in these areas need to be contacted directly by the District personnel, and encouraged to apply for cost share funding of the needed BMPs. Those SCDs that do not practice continuous signups are urged by TDA to hold their sign up in late winter or early spring, so that all required site visits can be made by the Regional Administrator prior to the SCD's submittal of their application for funding on or about May 1, 2000.

Watershed Prioritization. Following the evaluation of all the streams in the county and the signup date, the SCD board, the District Conservationist and the TDA Regional Administrator should collaborate to rank the applications for BMP cost share. The criteria for ranking needed BMPs should be developed at the local level, and it should focus on measurable water quality improvements. TDA recommends that SCDs develop a plan to systematically address all watersheds in their counties, with the ultimate goal of removing streams or segments of streams from the 303(d) List, and also to remove sources of impairment from streams not currently listed, so as to prevent them from ever being listed as an impaired water. This can be accomplished by focusing on one small watershed at a time, installing all needed BMPs within that small watershed and moving on to the next small watershed, utilizing a "worst watershed first" approach. In order to achieve these improvements to our waters, all BMP implementation programs must have a watershed focus. The process is this:

1. Select a small subwatershed,
2. Evaluate the watershed, identifying all BMPs that are needed to stop active erosion or the direct transport of pollutants to the state's waters,
3. Attempt to obtain 100% landowner participation in the watershed, through one-on-one meetings, or educational forums, etc.,
4. Make application for funding to TDA,
5. Install funded BMPs, and
6. TDEC personnel to conduct watershed monitoring after the BMP installations are complete.

Additional Funding. If at any time during the watershed evaluation the SCD becomes aware of water quality problems in their county that are not related to agricultural practices, and there is local interest in solving these problems, the SCD is encouraged to contact TDA and make an application for funding through the 319 nonpoint source program.

TDA recognizes that these recommendations could represent a change in the way funds are administered at the local level. It is imperative that the funds used through this program prove that voluntary cost share programs can restore impaired waters.

2. Guidance for BMP Implementation

Certain BMPs will be eligible to receive cost share funds through TDA's ARCF in Fiscal Year 2001. The funds will be administered locally through the Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors in each of Tennessee's 95 counties, with the concurrence of TDA's Regional Administrators. Technical assistance will be provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Specifications for all BMPs will be in accordance with the NRCS Field Technical Guide. Conservation Plans will be developed by the NRCS District Conservationist and will be strictly adhered to for the purpose of establishing eligibility for cost share payment. Higher rates of inputs may be used, however only those rates specified in the Conservation Plan will be eligible to receive cost share funding. Normal equipment and labor costs, whether privately hired or supplied by the cooperator (seedbed preparation, tractor usage, etc.) will not be eligible for cost share. Specialized equipment usage will be eligible for cost share, such as no-till drills, spriggers, bulldozers, backhoes, etc. Cost share for other specialized equipment will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The life span of all practices shall conform to NRCS requirements.

The cost share shall not exceed 75% of the cost of establishing agricultural BMPs, with a maximum payment of \$10,000 per person per year. The SCD Board of Supervisors may elect to set a lesser percent for cost shares, set a lesser maximum payment or use another payment system such as a flat rate. In the event of additional cost share funding from another source, the total amount of all cost shares shall not exceed 90% of the total cost of establishing the BMP.

3. BMP Specifics

Consistent with the TDA policy which was implemented in FY 2000, certain BMPs will be eligible for cost share without the need for a preliminary site visit from the Regional Administrator to determine eligibility. The following is a list of these **"No Site Visit Required" BMPs**:

Cropland Conversion

Grade Stabilization Structures

Sediment Control Basins

Diversions

Terraces

Grassed Waterways

Buffer/Filter Strips

Livestock Exclusion System. Components will include fencing, alternative watering sources, stream crossings, limited stream access and streambank stabilization and/or restoration, as needed.

Certain BMP will be eligible for cost share only after a site visit has been made to determine eligibility. The following is a list of these "**Site Visit Required**" BMPs:

Heavy Use Areas

Critical Area Treatment

Winter Cover. Seed for winter cover will be eligible for cost share at the 75% rate, but not to exceed \$5 per acre. No grazing, harvesting or haying will be allowed on winter cover practices. Seeding rates and dates will be either specified in the NRCS Conservation Plan or in accordance with the University of Tennessee Publication PB 378.

Ponds. Pond construction deemed eligible for funding must be a component of a livestock exclusion system or a rotational grazing system, consistent with the Conservation Plan. Ponds will be eligible for cost share at the 75% rate, but not to exceed \$1500.

Streambank Stabilization/Restoration, other than for Livestock Exclusion Rotational Grazing System

Seeding Practices. Seeding practices will be funded for the establishment of a permanent vegetative cover to be used for pasture or hay land. Establishment will be funded on Highly Erodible Land (HEL), and on tracts being converted from rowcrop, regardless of HEL designation. A soil test performed by a certified soil laboratory will be required. Cost sharing on lime and fertilizer will be based on soil test results. Eligible seeding rates and dates are those specified on the NRCS Conservation Plan or in accordance with the University of Tennessee Publication PB 378. Local SCD Boards, with the concurrence of the TDA Regional Administrator and the NRCS District Conservationist, have the option to extend seeding dates in the event that weather conditions prevent adherence to specified dates. Companion crop seeds (e.g. wheat) will not be eligible for cost share. Maintenance for a minimum for five years will be required on all permanent vegetative covers. Pasture and hayland renovation will be approved only where a soil loss potential exists (50% or more cover loss), and as recommended in the cooperators conservation plan. No funding for renovation will be given to pasture or hayland tracts where the soil loss tolerance "T" has been achieved.

Poultry Litter Storage

Facilities and Composters. A determination must be made that establishing such structures will result in water quality improvement at the site. The cost share will be at the 75% rate, not to exceed \$5,000.

Animal Waste Systems. The cost share for animal waste systems shall not exceed 75%, with the maximum payment to be determined by funding availability.

If a BMP is not listed on either of the above lists, then it would be classified as a Miscellaneous BMP, and as such, would be in the "Site Visit Required" Category. The need for the practice must be determined by the TDA Regional Administrator in consultation with the NRCS District Conservationist and approved by the SCD Board.

Forestry. Cost share assistance will again be furnished for forestry BMPs. All funded practices must demonstrate a direct positive impact on water quality.

Information and Education

(I&E) Projects. Projects that are directed toward landowners, producers and managers, such as field days, BMP demonstrations, seminars, informational material, and training/workshop events will be eligible, pending approval and funding availability.